

**Benton-Franklin
Health District**
www.bfhd.wa.gov

Kennewick
7102 West Okanogan Place

Pasco
412 West Clark Street

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**Benton-Franklin Health
District Website**
www.bfhd.wa.gov

**Washington Department
of Health**
www.doh.wa.gov

**Centers for Disease
Control**
www.cdc.gov

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INVESTIGATIONS INTO ANIMALS PURCHASED AT PASCO FLEA MARKET

Informing the public that some animal illnesses can be severe to humans

November 8, 2024

PASCO - The Benton-Franklin Health District (BFHD) and Washington State Department of Health (WA DOH) are investigating infections associated with the purchase of a cockatiel and small turtles from the Pasco Flea Market. Two people infected with *Salmonella* Poona had laboratory results that match a [national outbreak linked to small turtles](#). These people reported visiting or acquiring a turtle from the Pasco Flea Market. Samples collected from the acquired turtle tested positive for the outbreak strain. Additionally, a bird purchased from the Pasco Flea Market tested positive for avian chlamydiosis, a bacterial disease that can cause an illness known as psittacosis in humans. No human cases of psittacosis have been identified to-date associated with the Flea Market.

We're actively collaborating with the Pasco Flea Market to address health concerns and safeguard the community.

Avian Chlamydiosis associated with a cockatiel purchased from the Pasco Flea Market

Avian chlamydiosis (sometimes referred to as "parrot fever") can cause serious disease in birds and rarely causes disease in people (psittacosis), a flu like illness that can lead to pneumonia.

Parrot fever is typically found in cockatiels, parakeets, parrots, macaws, and other parrot-like (psittacine) birds, although many different types of birds can be infected. Symptoms in birds may include fatigue, decreased appetite, watery or discolored droppings, weight loss, eye or nasal discharge, and ruffled feathers. Healthy-appearing birds can also carry and shed the bacteria, particularly when they are stressed.

If you purchased birds from the Pasco Flea Market and if your bird appears sick, please speak to a veterinarian about your bird's health, mentioning that it may have been exposed to avian chlamydiosis.

Although the risk of spread of disease from birds to people is usually low, persons who have purchased pet birds should take a few steps to protect themselves and their bird. The most common way someone gets infected is by breathing in the dust from dried droppings and cage litter. Less commonly, birds infect people through bites and beak-to-mouth contact.

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- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling birds, their toys, cages, habitats, or other equipment.
- Use water and disinfectant such as household bleach (1:32 dilution or ½ cup bleach per gallon of water) to wet surfaces before cleaning bird cages or surfaces contaminated with bird droppings. Avoid dry cleaning to minimize circulation of feathers and dust.
- Safely clean your pet bird's cages and equipment. When cleaning cages, wear gloves and use a well-fitting mask. Don't clean equipment or materials in the kitchen sink as bacteria and other germs can contaminate your food handling areas.
- Monitor your pet bird's health. Visit a veterinarian who has experience with pet birds for routine check-ups to keep your bird healthy and prevent infectious diseases.
- Prevent contact between birds and people who are under five years of age, over 65 years of age, or who are immunosuppressed, as they are at highest risk of severe disease.
- Monitor your health. Symptoms of psittacosis in humans include fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a dry cough. More severe symptoms, such as pneumonia, can occur. If you get any of these symptoms, please consult with your health care provider and let them know of your bird contact so they can treat you accordingly.

To read more about the disease, please visit the [Washington State Department of Health's Psittacosis information page](#).

Salmonella poona associated with turtles purchased from the Pasco Flea Market

Two people infected with *Salmonella* Poona had laboratory testing results that match a [national outbreak linked to small turtles](#) reported visiting the Pasco Flea Market. One of these cases confirmed that the turtle they purchased at the Pasco Flea Market was smaller than four inches in length. The sale of turtles less than four inches in length ('tiny turtles') has been banned in the US since 1975 because of the increased risk of *Salmonella* transmission.

Salmonella can cause severe illness. People should know that any turtle can carry *Salmonella*. Children can more easily handle tiny turtles and are more likely to get sick. You can be exposed to *Salmonella* by contact with the turtle's environment, supplies, or areas where they live and roam.

"Turtles can look healthy and clean, but they can still carry germs," said JoDee Peyton, Supervisor and Environmental Public Health Expert at BFHD.

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If you own or are getting a pet turtle, consider these tips:

- Do not buy turtles with a shell less than four inches in length. These turtles are federally banned for sale in the U.S.
- Wash your hands well after handling turtles or anything in their environments. Do not wash their cages or equipment in the kitchen sink, or anywhere near food preparation areas.
- Do not nuzzle or kiss your pet turtle.
- Use precaution if you have high-risk household members. Consider picking a different pet if there is someone in your household who is under five years of age, over 65 years of age, or has a weakened immune system.

Symptoms of *Salmonella* can include severe or bloody diarrhea, fever, chills, abdominal discomfort, and vomiting. Symptoms generally appear one to three days after exposure. Serious bloodstream infections can occur, particularly in the very young or older adults. Call your health care provider if you have concerns about your or your family member's health and mention exposure to a turtle.

BFHD urges the public to purchase pets from reputable vendors

Animal vendors have responsibilities under [Washington State rules](#) to help prevent diseases from being transferred from animals to [people](#). The Pasco Flea Market is a valued event in our community with many attractions to enjoy. The Benton-Franklin Health District urges the public to purchase pets and livestock from reputable sellers and make sure to [pick the right pet for your family](#). BFHD urges the public to [read more about animal vendor requirements here](#) as they make informed choices about where to purchase the right pet for their family.

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